

UNILATERAL AND BILATERAL ACCOUNTS OF  
EXTERNALITY:  
THE GREAT OUTDOORS OR EXTERIORITY AS  
PRODUCED?

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ABSTRACT: In this paper I will be focusing on the introduction to Hilan Bensusan's latest work *Indexicalism: The Metaphysics of Paradox* and will be picking out some passages to look over and analyse through a contemporary Hegelian lens. This will be entitled Part 2. However, in Part 1 I will briefly share with you what appears in my aforementioned upcoming book (*Object Oriented Dialectics: Hegel, Heidegger, Harman*) as two paradoxical accounts of exteriority and how this relates (or contrasts) to Bensusan's own understanding of exteriority.

KEYWORDS: G.W.F Hegel; Indexicalism; Dialectics; Absolute Idealism; Phenomenology; Object Oriented Ontology; Graham Harman; Realism; Quentin Meillassoux; Correlationism

PART 1

For various health reasons I have had to put a sudden halt on what would have been a much longer and more extensive study of Bensusan's work in relation to my own re-definition of *externality* proposed in my forthcoming book *Object Oriented Dialectics; Hegel, Heidegger and Harman*<sup>1</sup>. Alternatively I will be focusing on Bensusan's Introduction (pgs 1 - 13 in the Edinburgh University Press completed

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<sup>1</sup> Johns, Charles William, *Object Oriented Dialectics: Hegel, Heidegger, Harman*, Mimesis International, 2022.  
www.cosmosandhistory.org

version, 2021)<sup>2</sup> and will be picking out some passages to look over and analyse through a contemporary Hegelian lens. This will be entitled **Part 2**. However, in **Part 1** I will briefly share with you what appears in my aforementioned upcoming book as two *paradoxical* accounts of exteriority.

- 1) The Hegelian account of exteriority as always external **to** something or other; whether this is the capacity of thought to reinscribe externality back into itself as thought/identity, or whether this is the view that every externality is a process which internality (or essence) must necessarily undergo (as a dialectical-ontological process of reality itself). In Hegel it is commonly known that essence (or the Idea) is a somewhat genetic logical principle which starts as an internalisation of sorts and subsequently finds its own identity (or higher-order identity) through its relation with an outside, which the Idea itself *sublates* as part of its identity. In this sense exteriority is subordinated (or sublated) into part of absolute geist's internal and necessary engine. In this sense we could even suggest that object oriented thinker Timothy Morton is a closet Hegelian when he says that “there is no “outside”—just the entire universe of entities constantly interacting, and you are one of them.”<sup>3</sup>
- 2) The Hegelian (but also Meillassouxian) account of speculative possibility (or contingency) which states that *Being* can *become* in an infinite amount of ways other than the one applicable to the laws of our planet earth (and in-fact the entire universe).

So we have an absolute object (earth or universe) which is *the ground for its own possibility* and hence self-determined in that sense (totality); every type of externality is *produced* as the expression (or as Hegel would have us put it *realisation*) of an immanent and internal engine or intuition of geist *which has no exteriority Other to itself*.

However, point 2 suggests that there is the *intellectual intuition* that there *could* be objects, laws, conditions outside of *our own* conditions of possibility (earth or

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<sup>2</sup> Bensusan, Hilan, *Indexicalism: The Metaphysics of Paradox*, Edinburgh University Press, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Morton, Timothy, Morgan Meis, Timothy Morton's Hyper-Pandemic, *The New Yorker*, June 8th, 2021.

universe), completely unknowable and completely *incompatible* with our modes of knowing. The proposition is one of delineation; there is no outside if we designate the universe (or multiverse) as the totality of all its internal material and mental constituents. However, if we designate a totality as *an object* - such as the earth (which I believe Hegel does) - then the question of different conditions of possibility for varying realities/space-times becomes a fruitful one; the affirmation of separate totalities (or *absolute* objects) as object-oriented conditions for how reality is then produced under such conditions. The question would then be whether such 'conditions' (of the absolute object) are relative (malleable) or whether they *cannot* be reduced to a 'shared space of reciprocal contact' (such as Harman's vicarious, occasionalist take on objects).

Through expounding both definitions we can intuitively say that I am both in disagreement and agreement with Hilan's work on indexicality and exteriority. I disagree that there is a unilateral exteriority which somehow imprints itself onto our perception, experience or metaphysical understanding of Being. All perceptions and experiences *belong to* the dialectical, ideational structure of earth and are self-fulfilling, self-determined and self-oriented (necessarily so). Attempting to extend phenomena, physical laws or any abstract external entity or force outside of the domain of such phenomena and laws is an anthropocentric, even earth-centric move which we could equate to the pre-critical leanings of philosophy<sup>4</sup>. Our existence is safe from such illusory exteriority; even if our earth was to suddenly implode, it would do so through the laws and phenomena of its own making and not some foreign spectre of demarcation.

However, that *radical contingency* or *possibility* exists, not as phenomena, object or entity, but as *speculative logic*, is an outside that I would affirm. Meillassoux explicates this rationale in his book *After Finitude* (2006) but very rarely do we come to think that Hegel himself came up with a very similar thesis. In his primary triad of logical categories, Hegel describes the relations between the concepts Being, Non-Being and Becoming. It would seem that this logical algorithm (similar to Aristotle's logic/syllogism in many ways) places Non-Being as a logical result - or binary identity - of Being, and then posits Becoming - not merely as a

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<sup>4</sup> For example; could I really say with complete conviction that entities on other planets show themselves in complete reciprocity to my own conditions of perception even though such entities do not abide by my earthly conditions or laws? Would I in-fact even be able to sustain contact with such entities without a giant telescope or a space suit?

sublatory third term - but also as the almost alchemical-logical result of Being's immanent *tension*<sup>5</sup> with Non-being. However, Hegel doesn't have much to say about Being or Non-Being as abstract or 'in-itself' terms prior to their synthesis in becoming; through becoming, *negation* suddenly makes sense as determining instants from out of this eternal ouroboros. As far as Hegel is concerned, Non-Being and Being - prior to their Becoming (a becoming which every man, animal, plant and stone is conditioned by) - is as speculative and anomalous as any unfounded or contingent proposition can be; determined by nothing but their own infinite ways of being actualised (*causa sui*).

In short then, we can say that Being and Non-Being are infinite virtual capacities (or possibilities); the being of the earth - or universe - is only one type or mode of Being which is specifically *actual* and *becomes* in a specific way, whilst many other possible tensions between Being and Non-Being could ensue.

These are the two forms of exteriority that I mobilise; 1) a dialectical-immanent-absolute model as self-contained dynamic totality and 2) a speculative, logical and radically Other possibility of different actualities of the dialectic (for example not obeying to natural-physical laws, phenomena etc.).

One way that I wish to achieve explicating the autonomy of an object (such as earth) grounding the conditions of its own possibility (absolutely), which I argue is seen in Hegel's absolute idealism and Heidegger's 'earth-philosophy', is to suggest that such absolute-objects lie side by side without touching each other (like Harman's occasionalist take on objects) whilst only appearing to share a common space sensually (through sensual translation of the real object). The *hard* argument would be that there is no real outside of earth which earth could successfully integrate into itself under its same conditions of possibility. The *weak* argument would be that the universe as a whole has no outside whilst planets share some kind of common space.

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<sup>5</sup> I use the word 'tension' to allude to Graham Harman's description of how time, space, essence and *eidōs* are shown to arise from tensions between objects and their qualities i.e an immanent tension like Hegel's triad of logical categories.

## PART 2

*Exteriority and Reality 1*

“There is an exteriority constantly shaping what is interior”<sup>6</sup>.

And

“Everything has something exterior to it”.<sup>7</sup>

(Bensusan, Hilan, *Indexicalism: Realism and the Metaphysics of Paradox*, E.U.P, 2021)

Although I empathise with what Meillassoux has somewhat pejoratively named *subjectalism* and *correlationism* regarding philosophies failure to think an absolute *outside* of the ostensible intertwining of thinking and being, should we really go so far as to employ a *unilateral* notion of exteriority, which “shapes what is interior” without considering an *interiority* which shapes its exterior?

When it comes to realism or any talk of ‘reality’, surely both domains of interiority and exteriority should be accommodated. Surely we should have *hospitality* for both. Why should the external count as any more real than the internal, especially considering that Bensusan’s externality merely indexes or delineates a kind of negative theology; a speculative realism that, contrary to Meillassoux, one cannot even properly speak of, therefore must be silent.

Whether we find it in Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant or Hegel, *both* outside and inside are at least heuristically accommodated *as real*, with the spirit of reconciling the two. Even when the speculative realists attempt to bolster the real as something totally *Other* to our habitual ways of thinking and experiencing, they do not prioritise the real as anything particularly *external* (as Bensusan quite rightly states<sup>8</sup>). Whilst it is true that Graham Harman has said that “the relation between an object and its own real qualities (we called this essence) is a relation produced by *outside* entities”<sup>9</sup> (my italics), we find this ‘outside’ extremely ambiguous, as whenever we look to the real, external object we become forever ensconced

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<sup>6</sup> Bensusan, Hilan, *Indexicalism: Realism and the Metaphysics of Paradox*, pg 4

<sup>7</sup> Ibid pg 11

<sup>8</sup> “If the main doctrines in this book follow speculative realism in its exorcism of transparency, it departs from the movement by insisting on the importance of exteriority”. (Bensusan) Ibid pg 6.

<sup>9</sup> Harman, Graham, *The Quadruple Object*. Zero Books; Illustrated edition. 2011. Pg 106/7

within its sensual translation, as a new object appears “nesting within objects within objects ... every relation between objects itself unfolding within another object”<sup>10</sup>. In other words, every postulation of externality is itself designated on *the interior* of the object *prehending* such an exterior (similar to Kant’s notion that every objective postulation is first-and-foremost conceived through subjective phenomena). Specifically with Meillassoux one could argue that his ‘realism’ does not stem from an exteriority but rather a radical *contingency* that gives factuality to observable entities, which can be intellectually intuited rationally (with no Heideggerian deconstruction of ‘presence’ found anywhere) and can be mathematically formalisable (all epistemological criterion found *inside* the correlation). If there does appear to be an ardent bent on equating exteriority with realism, we also must rethink this external real *without* it becoming a *condition* of subjectivity; my bones can exist without me but they are not wholly outside me. The molecules in the air can exist without me but they are not wholly outside me as I can touch them and grab them. The ‘withdrawn’ (Heidegger/Harman) is of course one way of explicating this, but what withdraws is seldom a real externality and more commonly an internal excess of reality in the object (the object can be subjected to many reductions, profiles, uses etc. without it becoming a different object ‘in-itself’). Furthermore, why is realism a drive towards *alterity*? Why does the real have to be other? This almost seems like a Deleuzian inclination, to disavow identity or sameness, but Deleuze’s argument is that identity is always constructed in the first place and NOT that the ‘real’ is somewhere else or other than identity.

*Exteriority and Reality 2 : G.W.F Hegel*

In Hegel the notion of externality is certainly connoted *epistemologically*; that identity should not be construed as merely external equivalences or analogy, that certain objects may have similar features in common but this does not mean that they share any coherent, unifying identity (this is Hegel’s criticism of empiricism which goes all the way through Hegel’s ontology).

Exteriority is produced, and there are two ways one can interpret this; the conventional way is that of essences or Ideas which unfold, develop and externalise, as if becoming actual and literally expressing the dynamism of the

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<sup>10</sup> Brassier, Ray, Collapse-Vol-III-*Speculative-Realism*-March-2007, pg 316

Idea. Yet there is also *another way*. Hegel sometimes talk about stumbling across externalities, and this seems similar to Kant's manifold in many ways<sup>11</sup>; there is something which has the *possibility* of being synthesised, 'grasped' as a concept, but instead remains stubbornly external/exteriorised by the mind;

“The object in its immediacy is the notion only potentially; the notion as subjective is primarily outside it; and all its specific character is imposed from without. As a unity of different, therefore, it is a composite, an aggregate; and its capacity of acting on anything else continues to be an external relation. This is Formal Mechanism. Notwithstanding, and in this connection and non-independence, the objects remain independent and offer resistance, external to each other.”<sup>12</sup> (Hegel, G.W.F, Part One of the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences: The Logic*, Cambridge University Press, 2015)

Of Course this could simply be a kind of Kantian comment on the *process* of identifying the manifold with intuitional, transcendental and adequate concepts, but Hegel does not strictly mean this. Instead he is suggesting that this aspect of non-identity inheres in *reality itself* (just as 'subjective' Ideas inhere within the reality in which it is thinking).

If this exteriority is *not* produced internally - as a process of inner structure realising itself through outer reflection - then what is it? Hegel designates this 'external relation' as simply a premature stage in a process whereby the object's essence has not been fully expressed in relation to its own function, but also in relation to its environment which co-supports its teleonomic nature (nature, spirit or world *as a whole*). The patient and difficult answer would be that the object just simply hasn't been understood - by itself or its equipmental environment - as teleonomically oriented yet. Hegel's essences cannot be fully pre-determined but instead find their essence, *find their way*, in relation to a living, changing, reconfiguring body of totality (this is what makes Hegel's 'forms' antithetical to Plato's). However, what really interests me is whether - similar to Harman's 'dormant' objects - some objects (as residual, as deposit, as useless etc.) can maintain this stubborn sense of exteriority within (or inside) a totality of relations

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<sup>11</sup> In the philosophy of Kant, the manifold is the unorganized flux presented to the senses, but not experienced, since experience results from the mind structuring the manifold by means of concepts. The nature of the unstructured manifold is unknowable (transcendental).

<sup>12</sup>Hegel, G.W.F, Part One of the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences: The Logic*, Cambridge University Press, 2015.

we could call earth? And is this where Bensusan's thesis could be *dialectically* infiltrated? For instance, could this lack of any function, clear form, and interior mechanism, point to an indexical presence haunting the logic of worldly presence and givenness itself, or could this lack simply inhere within the strife - or broken tool theory - of the world itself as an immanent machine? In other words, does Bensusan's indexical exteriority designate a unilateral force that interrupts the earth's self-compositional process, or is this indexical interruption already dialectically encoded in the earth as self-relating negativity

*Exteriority and Reality 3: Indexicalism or Unity?*

And this brings us to the huge chasm between Bensusan and my self's work; the instances of determination or negation within Hegel's *objective* idealism (as opposed to Kant's transcendental idealism) rely on a concept of *the whole* which grounds these instances, gives them possibility (the possibility of mutual, shared change and not radical alterity), and gives them coherence (to cohere means to form a unified whole, but also to be logically consistent). I would argue - similar to Harman's Husserlian critique of empiricism - that one cannot *point* substantially to a thing at all without there first being a kind of intentional (or in Hegel's terms logical) unity inhering in the object, surpassing its multiple profiles and adumbrations. An entity can definitely be more external than internal (within the spectrum of functionality), yet this may be to do (as I have mentioned qua Hegel) with the lack of relations/comprehension an object may have (Harman's 'dormant' object); *unity* is determined by what an object can *retain* above and beyond its relations (and this still allows diamonds 200 kms below the surface of the earth, or faeces, to be objects, just ones that either have no future of retaining more relations (dormant) or fail to retain themselves under relationality (the many quasi-objects of chemistry for example). Whether we wish to associate impetus qua *final cause* (Aristotle), *conatus* (Spinoza) or *equipmentality* (Heidegger), what is open to critical consideration (or simply refining) is the notion that function cannot be reduced exclusively to external instances; there needs to be something internal and above those parts which rises above mere external functionality (as a retainable object for example) but also exhibits a natural propensity to reconfigure itself into other teleonomic structures (the argument for a holism of equipmentality/the Idea).

Furthermore, there is an *epistemological* problem in Bensusan's indexicalism that needs to be rectified or completely reconstructed here; whether it is to be found in the explicit *unity* of Descartes *cogito ergo sum*<sup>13</sup> or Kant's *unity* of apperception, we are told that the capacity to assimilate and schematise plurality and Otherness rests upon either a transcendental unity, a rational unity or indeed an existential unity in Heidegger;

“This certainty, that "I myself am in that I will die," is the basic certainty of Dasein itself. It is a genuine statement of Dasein, while cogito sum is only the semblance of such a statement. If such pointed formulations mean anything at all, then the appropriate statement pertaining to Dasein in its being would have to be *sum moribundus* [I am in dying], *moribundus* not as someone gravely ill or wounded, but insofar as I am, I am *moribundus*. The MORIBUNDUS first gives the SUM its sense.”<sup>14</sup>

In this sense, do we not rely on at least an unconscious predilection of unity when we give out demonstratives or indexicals (just as Žižek and Sbriglia rely *solely* on this unconscious predilection when espousing their neo-Lacanian ‘Subject’)? And is it not the nouns or substantives that condition (and again, are at least unconsciously implicit) in any sort of pointing; in proximity to some ostensible *unity* or other? Perhaps controversially we could also add Harman's notion of unity (or unit) in the object to these critiques of non-substantials (non-substances?) and I still believe an *epistemology of units* - similar but complexifying Aristotle's project- could be mobilised in Harman's philosophy<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> This can be reformulated as; "we cannot doubt *of our existence as a unity* while we doubt" or "if I doubt, I doubt as a unity". Even if it is only thinking that is occurring, as suggested by Pierre Gassendi, I would argue that this thinking would still have to be tied to a unity or itself unified to be understood in the first place.

<sup>14</sup> Heidegger, Martin; Kisiel, Theodore (1985). *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*. Indiana University Press. p. 317.

<sup>15</sup> Micah Tewers is working on what he would call an ‘analogical’ epistemology of Harman's Quadruple Object. In his own words; “For both Simondon and Harman any situation requires four terms to articulate a grammatical subject/object position and then also the entropic information (qualities for G.H) and negentropic form (object, G.H) of each respective term. For Harman a working analogy (or allure, analogue translation) simply generates a new entity, a situation with its very own new form and information. For Simondon a working analogy between situations opens a brand new field of inquiry (for example, a proper analogy between two sciences opening up a third); and his big work (*Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information*) is riddled with examples of this.

It is difficult for me - although I completely admire Bensusan's creativity and polemicism on this point of indexicals - to conform because I have personally spent so much time seeking and reconciling Hegel's objective idealism away from Kant's pure apperception; into a self-synthesising function of reality itself qua a totality of relations or syntheses of varying levels (in one sense a 'flat ontology' of relations and objects, or relations and Ideas). The coherence of which dangles like a jewel around a particular notion of a dynamic movement towards *the whole*; the whole as an overcoming which *preserves* what it overcomes.

*Exteriority and Reality 4: Stellar Void or Cosmic Animal<sup>16</sup>/Multiplicity Or Totality?*

"Indexicalism chooses to embrace paradox to avoid substantive, totalising and non-situated alternatives that leave no room for what is other" (Bensusan, pg 8)

And ...

"The situated metaphysics of the others proposed in the book posits reality as intrinsically incomplete" (Bensusan, pg 11)

This following point is complex; I have criticised this flippant disavowal of totality (or fashionable, pejorative stance upon totality) in my critique of Slavoj Žižek and Russell Sbriglia<sup>17</sup>. In my opinion (and Hegel's), a totality can transform, expand, externalise - as self contained - without ever being the same state more than once. Becoming does not presuppose lack and this is perhaps a Meillassouxian point<sup>18</sup>. I do not see how anything can be incomplete on one level - something is always completely incomplete; the whole of a piece or a piece of a whole. The word 'completion' takes on too much of a semantic role here; I would need to understand what the world lacks in order to make this statement.

"..reality is never complete and therefore cannot do away with exterior borders."  
(Bensusan, pg 6).

Suffice it to say that interior is not fundamentally analogous with totality whilst exteriority is not fundamentally analogous with incompleteness. Hegel

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<sup>16</sup> This title refers to an essay by Ray Brassier on similar contra-distinctive themes of becoming and otherness regarding the whole and the incomplete that will be discussed in this section. Brassier's original essay discusses such issues in relation to Badiou (ontological incompleteness) and Deleuze (Ontological univocity).

<sup>17</sup> Charles W. Johns, 'Speculative Realism OR Complicit Materialism: Graham Harman & Russell Sbriglia', [https://www.academia.edu/52333386/Speculative\\_Realism\\_OR\\_Complicit\\_Materialism\\_Graham\\_Harman\\_and\\_Russell\\_Sbriglia?from\\_navbar=true](https://www.academia.edu/52333386/Speculative_Realism_OR_Complicit_Materialism_Graham_Harman_and_Russell_Sbriglia?from_navbar=true)

<sup>18</sup> Meillassoux, Quentin, *Time and Becoming*, Mimesis International, 2018.

would be adamantly against this polarisation and this making-static of the two sides. Unity is most commonly seen as a dialectically generated construct that simultaneously depends on - yet resists - both sides; even when Kant makes his case for the unity of apperception he indeed depends on a single common subject that coheres with the ‘internal’ unity of mind (as well as mobilising various quasi-external equipment such as language).

Ontologically and epistemologically speaking it simply makes more common-sense to suggest that our capacity to totalise (or universalise) certain recurring features of experience and theory is exactly what allows us to make philosophical claims in the first place. Why is reality never complete? Why can’t reality be constantly moving, shifting and adapting whilst restoring or reconfiguring its completeness in every moment? Self-determined or self-fulfilling theories of how the universe (or at least earth) operates (such as Hegel’s dynamic theory of *geist*) seems less problematic because it does not have to account for some dogmatic or hypostatized external element that causes or interferes with such immanent determining principles, leading to questions such as what is this other element exterior to it and is it a difference in degree or kind, a fundamental dualism or a *view from nowhere* espoused by the objectivity of some physicists.

“Transcendence is relative to a position and is precisely what escapes speculation. Realism is the drive towards what is exterior, towards alterity as an ever-pressing *diaphonía*” (Bensusan, 9)

This sentence encapsulates my concerns; if transcendence is relative to a position, and if exteriority is a form of transcendence, then this exteriority is hence relative to a position and not unilaterally exterior (i.e non-relative to any proximity/ Other etc.). Furthermore, speculation and transcendence has traditionally been seen as complementary; our very possibility to at least attempt (however illusorily) to transcend our complicit material and temporal existence is what allows us to speculate upon lots of philosophically inclined things. Surely if “transcendence is relative” then it does not escape speculation!

#### *Exteriority and Reality 5: Negation as Externalisation*

“A transcendent exterior is not a negation” - (Bensusan, pg 10).

When Bensusan states that a “transcendent exterior is not a negation” I assume that he is saying that ‘his’ transcendent exterior is *just there*; indifferent and

thoroughly Other. Almost a Platonic externality (if we could even say such a thing). For Hegelians, a transcendent exterior is undeniably a negation; objective, absolute self-relating negativity is what reality does, it's how it *becomes*. As Ray Brassier describes succinctly;

“Hegel and the various forms of objective idealism will say that reality itself is self-synthesising, that there is a kind of principle of synthesis encoded in objective reality itself. So that, famously, in Hegel's objective idealism, the relational synthesis which Kant takes to be constitutive of objectivity is simply transplanted from its localisation in the subject and construed rather as the relation between subject and object, which Hegel recodes as the 'self-relating negativity' that yields the structure of reality.”<sup>19</sup>

Negation not only allows for a kind of negative process philosophy (of subtractive moments *ad infinitum*), it is also a mechanism which subtracts *from the whole* in order to actualise any conscious (and perhaps other) instant whatsoever. This is in a sense Badiou's subtractive ‘counting’ but it is also more traditionally how Hegel describes the passage between *total* Being as indefinite, indifferent ‘immediate externality’ (I find it useful to use Deleuze's notion of the ‘virtual’ here) and *particular*, actual qualities that now exist when thought (or when instantiated by any process of reality) as relative to other points in space and time. We can say, somewhat crudely, that if Kant explicates this in subjective/a priori terms, Hegel tries to explain it in objective terms *beyond* that of human synthesis.

*Exteriority and Reality 6: Is Exteriority Itself Contingent or Absolute?*

However, what I am really interested regarding Bensusan's work is a possible idea of exteriority that is *not* contingent; an exteriority that is relentlessly always there. In a sense, Hegel can be read in a certain way to suggest that exteriority - as I have mentioned - is always moving and self-relating itself as part of an interiority (whether this be the interior of a certain essence/identity or the interior of simply the absolute Spirit). *However*, Hegel's conception of movement is absolute; it is an *eternity* and not a *bad infinity* (as he used to pejoratively say). Like Plato it is a “moving image of eternity” but then what is contingent about this? The process is contingent in a local sense; how it develops is immanent, but the origins or catalyst of such a movement is not a chronological process but - if you pardon the

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<sup>19</sup> Brassier, Ray, Collapse-Vol-III-*Speculative-Realism*-March-2007 (Urbanomic). Pg 309.

term - a circular one.

This is what distinguishes Hegel from say Iain Hamilton Grant's 'speculative physics'. Grant states that "everyone believes that nature is before thought"<sup>20</sup> but this 'before' is used *ontologically* to suggest that reality is itself - as Nature - a chronological production process with local "events"<sup>21</sup> and "laws"<sup>22</sup>. This is *contra* the notion that reality is always ontologically there (its Being, Becoming, Non-Being) yet actualised differently depending on an eternal series of self-comprehending forms. I am sure this will be obnoxiously or dogmatically too western-metaphysical in flavour for Bensusan, yet indexicality as *always there* yet shaping an inside that plays this eternity out in different ways, might be of interest. Could this be similar to Meillassoux's *absolute* hyper-chaos that traces the *relative* contingency of matter which he calls factual?

"The claim that reality is transparent is in line with the idea that experience provides a space of immanence where nothing, in principle, transcends its reach."  
(Bensusan, pg 2)

I believe this exact description and correlation of immanence and experience does not have to explicitly rule out a speculative notion of transcendence; while it is true that the conditions of possibility for experience are inextricably intertwined with its object (i.e earth as producing these conditions and further producing 'subjects' for example) this does not mean that there are not *possible* (whether real or logical-mathematical) processes which exist beyond those conditions. Whether this is through Meillassoux's radical contingency or Hegel's original dialectical triad of categories (being, non-being, becoming), both emphasise the possibility for novel grounds in which general laws and spatio-temporal structures could arise and be absolutely outside, or indifferent to, the ones produced - for example - by nature. This is in a sense how one could have their cake and eat it regarding an immanent, absolute theory of relationality, manifestation and ideation regarding bio-ontology and epistemology (the earth as absolute object/totally), whilst on the other hand realising that this is not sufficient but just retrospectively necessary (and hence can speculate/transcend such immanence). In other words, other absolute objects that express their own

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, Presentation by Iain Hamilton Grant, pgs 334 - 345.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

unique conditions of being, non-being and becoming, exist outside of our own immanent human-world correlate.

“Speculation is thereby called into question. It has to be limited in the sense that its task of projecting the same onto the other can be interrupted at any point by the unconditional exteriority of the other.” (Bensusan, pg 8)

But does speculation project the same on the other? And later ...

“The Great Outdoors calls into question any intended full description.” (Ibid)

But is ‘the great outdoors’ not a product of this speculation? And is it not a full description in the absolute sense (the necessity of contingency?). Meillassoux’s ‘great outdoors’ is as ‘full a description’ as you can get philosophically speaking.

*Exteriority and Reality 7: Absolute or Contingent Objects*

“Correlation is itself contingent, and this lesson is forgotten when it is assumed to be absolute” (Bensusan, pg 4).

This more heuristic notion of absolute objects - distinguished from relative objects (or perhaps a cacophony of smaller absolute objects) is *half*-against the idea that - “Correlation is itself contingent, and this lesson is forgotten when it is assumed to be absolute”.

The degrees of difference between the possibility of absolute and contingent correlations needs to be examined closer here; if an object may come into existence and fade out of it (through contingency), can the object not still withhold a type of reality only incumbent upon itself? If an external relation (such is how contingency could be possibly formulated) can only ever *translate* the object which it is affecting, then there is still an absolute distinction (or tension) between both formulations of external and internal, of object and relation (however thin this skin-like distinction/tension is). Like Plato, what is *absolute* here might be the very capacity - as a kind of invisible *form* - for the object to distinguish its conditions of possibility as irreducible to - or fundamentally different to - an arbitrary realm of cause and effect such as the billiard balls of an objective one-dimensional materialism. It might not be correct to call this capacity a ‘condition’ in the naturalistic sense - of how nature could be said to condition humans - but rather a kind of Kantian condition that is created as soon as an object emerges as a unity that can contain internal change as differentiated from external change. Please note that this distinction or tension between objects and their relations (or

their exteriority) is still vulnerable to reconfiguration and sublation a'la Hegel's theory of reconfiguring objects *teleologically*; it is a *modal* distinction whereby relations can become integrated into objects/interiors/unities and vice versa depending on the development of Ideas in relation to the absolute or 'world'.

An absolute object is still vulnerable to destruction just as Harman's objects are still unified objects of integrity regardless of how short or long their existence is. Their possible destruction does not discount that what is being destroyed is an object which breeds its very own conditions of possibility, an object which 'translates' difference and change in a specific way concomitant with its qualities, properties; its essence. The absolute would then mean the entire scope - or totality - of possible translations that the object can have; its correlate of prehension. Perhaps a human-as-object, although contingent upon external factors (or larger objects) still has this absolute aspect in the sense that the biological grounds for the possibility of subjective experience ends with the subject who experiences such when it dies (an absolute existential-correlative object in this sense).

“The situated metaphysics of the others proposed in the book posits reality as intrinsically incomplete. The absence of totality can be compared with what Deleuze in his work with Félix Guattari called  $n-1$ , a multiplicity of conjoined elements forming no unity”. (Bensusan, pg 10).

I would be interested to know what Graham Harman thinks about the above passage. I know Harman himself has disavowed any notion of totality but what about “a multiplicity of elements forming no unity”? I would like to suggest that the possible existence of unity in objects (something that Harman would affirm) already suggests a *type of* totality (totality meaning something that constitutes a whole in the Cambridge dictionary). And what of the *earth as an object*; something that constitutes a whole - is this not a totality? And, if we live *within* that object, as a constant reconfiguration of its parts, then could we not suggest that we exist within a totality? And does this totality have to be set against concepts such as infinity or otherness?

*Exteriority and Reality 8: Is Realism Common-Sensical or Non-Common-Sensical?*

“If the metaphysics of the others is not exactly a speculative realism, it is certainly a non-commonsensical one. Reality is considered to be unavailable to a view from

nowhere” (Bensusan, pg 9)

This is an intriguing statement to me because reality - as considered to be “*unavailable* to a view from nowhere” (Bensusan) - has become the *new commonsensical position*. For example; the materialism of Badiou and Zizek all espouse a kind of complicit ‘blind spot’ or ‘lacunae’ in reality itself, which must be somewhat loosely influenced by theories of observer and observed in quantum physics ( a literal, ontological perspectivism). Hence, a non-commonsensical approach would indeed be an attempt to hypostatize an indifferent and complete *reality* distinct from human intervention (or an absolute facticity of thought accomplished in Meillassoux’s project). If “reality is considered to be unavailable to a view from nowhere” then what allows us to *point to* the real; what is the criterion of the real? The lack of an attempt to hypostatize a real *from somewhere* is in-fact why Zizek and Sbriglia call their projects a materialism (they are not equipped with any traditional definition of the real in philosophy). I see no reason to hesitate in placing Bensusan’s work into the same category; ontological incompleteness and the impossibility of any substantive claim about the world as a generic or universal category becomes *materialisms new clothes*.

#### *Future Notes*

Throughout this paper, three general, yet helpful, notions of exteriority have been formulated:

- 1: A bilateral exteriority; an outside which is reciprocal with what it is relating to/complicit in (Hegel’s self-relating negativity).
- 2: A unilateral exteriority; an exteriority which is commonly 'translated' (Harman) but not sublated by what it comes into contact with (translation is one-sided, regardless of how many objects are confronting each other at the time). However, it must be noted that sometimes, rarely, real objects 'fuse' together under such circumstances.
- 3: A unilateral exteriority which posits more of a radical *possibility* of difference/otherness (Meillassoux) as opposed to an *actual* external entity of some kind; that the laws of nature are haunted by a spectre of otherness that could change these laws at any moment.

Perhaps it would be beneficial to read through Bensusan’s book again with these definitions of externality in mind; to mark a kind of topology or spectrum,

where bilateral proximity fades into unilateral, impossible (non-totalizable) *Otherness* ... and vice versa.

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